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ABSTRACT

This sourcebook was written for teachers, counselors, and other adults who work with children from violent homes. It is based on the belief that it is never too early to intervene with victims of domestic violence. The introduction defines domestic violence, describes what happens to children in violent homes, identifies abusers, examines the woman's role in the violent family, lists symptoms of abuse in children, and looks at problems related to domestic violence. A chapter on helping children from violent homes examines what children from violent homes need, discusses issues of honest communication with domestic violence victims, and explains how adults may present positive role models to children, thus building their self-esteem. Techniques for working with children from violent homes are discussed, including the use of books, guided fantasy, open-ended storytelling, discussion of pictures, art projects, and games. Characteristics of the aggressive, silent, and ethnic child are considered. The final chapter discusses approaching the mother, what agencies need to know, agencies to call, and how the teacher or counselor can take care of herself. Suggested readings and lists of state and national resources are included. (NB)

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WORKING WITH CHILDREN FROM VIOLENT HOMES

Ideas and Techniques

Written by Diane Davis

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This book is dedicated with love and appreciation to MKD,
one of ***my*** *greatest teachers.*

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Introduction

In today's society we have a growing problem that is both dangerous and destructive. It is domestic violence. Not only does it damage the lives of the adults involved, it also greatly affects their children. They suffer psychologically and may also be victims of physical and sometimes sexual abuse.

As adults, it is very important for us to be aware of how serious the problem of domestic violence is and understand what we can do to break its generational cycle.

Working with Children from Violent Homes: Ideas and Techniques and *Something Is Wrong At My House* are meant to reach out to the children of domestic violence and to the adults who work with them. The books are also intended to inform other children about what domestic violence is and how they may be able to help a friend who is living in a violent household. Often, children will turn to a friend to discuss problems, fears and concerns before they go to an adult for help.

I believe that it is never too early to intervene with victims of domestic violence. The sooner children are taken out of a violent environment and taught how to acknowledge their feelings and express them without violence, the better chance they have of moving out of the cycle of abuse. Such intervention requires patience, caring, sensitivity, skill and knowledge about the subject. In *Working with Children from Violent Homes: Ideas and Techniques* I relate information I have found helpful and share the techniques that have brought positive results with children.

No one should have to live with the threat of violence. Children deserve to grow up in homes where they have positive role models and are taught constructive ways of coping with the emotions and situations in their lives.

The building of self-esteem is also essential. All children deserve to be acknowledged as special, lovable individuals. They are the seeds of our future and a reflection of what they see and learn at home. It is up to us to facilitate their growth in an atmosphere that encourages non-violent behavior, builds healthy self-images and teaches them how to live happy, productive, fulfilling lives.

What Is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is the repeated use of forceful physical or psychological behavior for the purpose of coercion without regard for the individual rights of another.

Battering can be physical, emotional, sexual and/or social. If the abuse is physical and escalates to a high degree of intensity the result can be fatal, ending either in suicide or murder.

1. One in three women is a battered woman.
2. Ninety percent of children living in violent homes are aware of what is going on.
3. Thirty-five percent of the children are also abused in some way.

What Happens to Children in Violent Homes?

Children living in violent homes often grow up exhibiting the same behavior as their parents. This is especially true of boys.

1. Eighty percent of batterers were either abused or witnessed abuse in their homes as children.
2. Boys often become hostile toward the women they are closest to—their mothers, sisters and wives. They may also abuse their children.
3. Girls may take on the role of victim or are abusive themselves.

No matter what their age, children in violent homes receive the message that violence is an effective means of gaining control over others. Yet it is frightening for them to see the people they love the most and are dependent upon abusing each other.

Who Are the Abusers?

Batterers come from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, races and religions. The problem is not limited, therefore, to any particular walk of life.

There are incidents in which women are the batterers. They are just as capable of yelling, hitting and throwing things as men. They can also be psychologically

abusive toward their partners. However, their ability to seriously injure their partner without using a weapon is limited. Male batterers, on the other hand, have the advantage of physical strength and can cause grave injury or death by using their bare hands.

Why Do Women Stay?

1. Despite the abuse, they love their husband/partner.
2. They keep hoping things will get better.
3. They grew up in a similar environment and feel "this is how things are" (this is called "learned helplessness").
4. They are emotionally dependent on the abuser.
5. They are financially dependent on the abuser.
6. They have low self-esteem.
7. They don't want anyone to know because there is considerable social stigma attached to domestic violence.
8. Their religious beliefs keep them from leaving.
9. They are afraid of what the abuser will do to them if he finds them.
10. They want their children to have a father.

There are other reasons, each dependent upon the individual situation. Many women choose to deny they are being abused because they are afraid to make the changes necessary to break out of the pattern. These women walk an emotional tightrope and their children must live with that tension.

Men who are battered and choose to stay do so for many of the same reasons that women stay.

Symptoms of Abuse in Children

Infants:

1. Injury to body
2. Fretful sleep
3. Fearful reaction to a man's voice

4. Developmental slowness
5. Lethargy
6. Physical neglect (diaper rash, sores, etc.)
7. Vaginal or rectal discharge (often indicating sexual abuse)

Toddlers:

1. Injury to body
2. Frequent illness
3. Severe shyness
4. Low self-esteem
5. Reluctance to be touched
6. Trouble in preschool or day care
7. Extreme interest in sex play
8. Social problems including being argumentative, engaging in hitting and biting, and difficulty with sharing

School Age Children:

1. Injury to body
2. Frequent illness
3. Hitting
4. Stealing
5. Lying
6. Nightmares
7. Eating disorders
8. Repetitive self-abuse
9. Nervous disorders (tics)
10. Lack of motivation
11. Poor grades
12. Being "too perfect"
13. Depression
14. Withdrawal
15. Need for a lot of attention
16. Sophisticated knowledge about sex
17. Drug/alcohol use (usually upper grades).

It is not uncommon for the children, usually the eldest, to become caretakers in the family. This increased responsibility makes their emotional burden heavier.

Problems Related to Domestic Violence

Alcohol and other drug abuse often occur in violent homes. Substance abuse is *separate* from the battering, however, and must be brought under control before the physical and/or emotional abuse can end. Batterers will claim that drinking or drugs "make them do it," but this is absolutely not the case. Drugs give the abuser excuses *not* to accept responsibility for his actions. The abuse will not automatically cease because the drinking and drug abuse stop.

Sexual abuse is another problem that may occur in conjunction with domestic violence. Most children are particularly afraid to mention sexual abuse.

Helping Children From Violent Homes

What Children from Violent Homes Need

Children from violent households need someone they can talk to about their feelings and what is going on in their homes. Often they are not able to communicate with their mothers because they see them as victims like themselves. They need to be able to confide in an adult who can objectively assess the problem, give the children (and the mother, if skilled to do so) ideas and options for taking care of themselves both physically (safety measures) and emotionally (outlets for fear and anger).

Be Open and Honest

Let the child know who you are. He or she will watch you carefully. If you are honest, consistent and caring in the way you relate to the child, there is a good chance he or she will begin to trust you. At domestic violence shelters children often observe the way in which adults treat the other children, especially the babies. They are more likely to trust someone who interacts well and in a caring way with all the others in the room.

Notice Tangibles

Most children like to be noticed. Comment on something you like about the child and comment on what he or she is doing that you sense they also like about themselves. Make them feel special. They may be very needy.

1. "I like that pink T-shirt you are wearing, Ann. I've noticed that pink looks very nice on you."
2. "I watched you throwing the football at recess, Juan. You really have a strong arm and throw well."
3. "Your choice of colors for that picture is lovely, Judy. It makes your picture extra-special."
4. "I like being with you, Tommy."
5. "It's fun sitting next to you while you paint, Yolanda."

Talk About Their Interests

I have found it helpful to keep abreast of what is currently popular with children. Movies, songs, video games, TV shows, sports events, clothing styles and fad toys are subjects most children are willing to talk about. They are especially pleased when adults are tuned in to their interests. It often helps them feel comfortable enough to begin opening up with their feelings and experiences. Discussing movies, TV shows and song lyrics is a way of finding out about the children's beliefs and values and how they see and interpret the world.

For example:

The popular song "Beat It" once encouraged a 4½-year-old girl to recount, in great detail, the way her father had once shouted the same words at her and then both physically and sexually abused her.

Provide the Opportunity to Talk About Feelings and Experiences

Most children love fantasy and easily become engrossed in whatever the "props" are saying or doing. The adult who wants to get a message across to children, or help them get in touch with and verbalize their feelings, can often accomplish this by using stuffed animals or puppets. Children generally feel less threatened talking with toys than talking with people.

For example:

Susan and Kathy were new to the shelter and were quiet, fearful and withdrawn. It was lunchtime and the counselor who had been with them all morning had to leave. When a new counselor entered the room to serve lunch, Susan and Kathy became even more withdrawn.

There was a stuffed bunny on the kitchen counter. The new counselor had the bunny say hello and introduce herself. She then hopped around to make sure the girls' meals were prepared right, testing to see if the soup had cooled off enough and if the sandwiches smelled good. The girls were fascinated and began to laugh and talk to the bunny. The bunny then whispered things into the counselor's ear, and she

relayed the messages to the girls. Thus she was able to enter into the conversation herself.

By the end of lunchtime, the girls, counselor and bunny were all friends. Susan and Kathy were at ease and eagerly got down from their chairs and went into the play room to build the bunny a house.

Model Having Fun

It is beneficial to put children, especially children of domestic violence, in touch with their ability to have fun and enjoy themselves. They need an adult role model who gives them permission to have a good time. If they see an adult can do the same thing and play with them, they often join in the fun.

For example:

Whenever I play music in the play room, I immediately begin to sing or dance. The children watch for a moment and then join in.

* * * * *

I once asked the children to pretend to be spiders and experience everything they thought spiders might experience. I became a spider too. We crawled all over the room making faces and sounds. They started out by staying close to me, but once they got into their roles, they branched out.

* * * * *

One summer day we made a teeter-totter out of a board and a box. I encouraged two of the children to sit on one end of the board while I sat on the other. They were able to control whether I would go up or down and, of course, they loved it.

* * * * *

John was an 11-year-old who was quiet and reserved. I asked him if he would like to play pass with a football. At first, as we threw the ball back and forth, I commented on his technique and ability. He just smiled. Then he began to tell me about how he had played pass with his father.

John's younger sister was standing on the sidelines watching and listening. She asked if she could play too. It was all right with John, so she stood next to him to receive the ball. Soon they began to talk about how their father had treated each of them differently. They went on to share their feelings about their father, his anger and their own fears.

Playing with them put me on their level for that period of time. They felt comfortable enough to say the things that direct therapy had failed to bring forth.

Let Them Know You Are Receptive to What They Ask or Say

Children are more likely to be open if they feel they will be listened to and believed. The subject of domestic violence makes many people uncomfortable. Children sense this and learn to hold their feelings inside. Many children keep quiet to protect their parents or because they have been threatened with punishment if they speak out. Let the children know you are available if they want to talk. If the subject makes you uncomfortable, find an appropriate person or organization to refer these children to.

Use Books to Help Children Verbalize Feelings

Reading books out loud is a direct, nonthreatening way to introduce them to the subject of domestic violence. *Something Is Wrong at My House* is an appropriate book to read to a class, group or individual child. When the group is small and the children are able to read well, you might let each child take turns reading. (One teacher chose to read one page per day to her class so that the book could be discussed more thoroughly.)

By reading the book and encouraging the children to comment on what it has to say, you are making it clear that you are aware domestic violence exists and you are someone the children can come to for further information (even if you refer them elsewhere).

Use Guided Fantasy

In a guided fantasy the teacher, therapist or group leader tells the children they are going on an imaginary trip or adventure. Most children think this is great fun and readily close their eyes to participate in the chosen journey. (There are numerous books available suggesting fantasies leaders might use. See *Suggested Readings* for examples.)

The children are encouraged to experience certain feelings during their fantasy trip. When the trip is over, give them the opportunity to draw, verbalize or write what they saw, did and felt during their fantasy. (The children's observations are interesting, especially those who have witnessed abuse in their homes.) In discussing a child's picture or story, the adult has the opportunity to spend non-threatening one-on-one time with him or her. Children of domestic violence are often afraid, even embarrassed or ashamed to be obviously singled out for a discussion about their home environment. Some children draw the opposite of what they are feeling—their fantasy is how they would like things to be.

For example:

I once asked the children in my group to draw a picture of their home life. Three drew pictures indicating fighting and sadness in their homes. The fourth child, however, chose to draw a picture of her family bicycling together with smiles on their faces. When I asked her if bicycling was something her family did together often, she said that it was, but that usually it wasn't a very pleasant experience. She would get tired and cry and ask to go back home; her father would get angry with her; and this, in turn, would make her mother nervous and scared. In reality, bicycling together was seldom a pleasant experience for the family.

Open-Ended Story-Telling

The leader chooses a subject and begins a story about it. Each child then has an opportunity to add to the story. For instance: "Janet woke up and heard her father shouting at her mother in the next room. . ." It helps to have a more open, verbal child be the first one to add to the leader's beginning. Other children will usually join in with

their additions to the story, frequently based upon what they have experienced in their own lives.

Discussing Pictures

The use of pictures showing various emotions is an excellent way to conduct a discussion about feelings. Making collages showing children with different facial expressions is a fun and nonthreatening way to help children become aware of their various emotions. School supply stores and catalogs often carry packets of large pictures that show children experiencing different emotions. They are excellent for stimulating group discussion.

I also use *Something Is Wrong at My House* and other story books that have illustrations reflecting feelings and ask, before reading the text:

What do you see happening on this page?
How are the characters feeling?
Have you ever felt this way?
What do you do when you feel like they do?

Art Projects

Using art projects to help children express their feelings is excellent. Art work can be fun, relaxing and enlightening to the adult working with the children. Several art projects that work well with children of domestic violence (as well as children in general) are:

1. Have the children draw an angry face on one side of the paper and a happy face on the other. Encourage them to use colors that remind them of anger or happiness and to talk about what they are drawing.
2. Cut life-size T-shirts out of butcher paper for each child. Tell them they are going to go to a party wearing their shirts and that it will tell people all about them. Have them write adjectives about themselves all over their shirts. Or, tell them to wear one side of the shirt when they are angry, afraid or sad and the other side when they are happy. Have them write the words they associate with the emotions on opposite sides of the shirt.
3. Ask the children to draw their dream house with an

ideal family in it. Have them discuss how the people in their ideal family are feeling and what makes each person happy. Suggest they use colors to reflect their various feelings. (For instance, sometimes children choose black or red to represent anger and lighter colors to reflect happiness.)

4. Tell the children you are going to play a guessing game with them. Say you are about to draw four individual faces showing different emotions. Let them guess which pictures represent which emotions. Have them tell you what makes them feel happy, sad, scared and angry. Then encourage them to draw their own four pictures of feeling faces.

Games

The Fish Game is popular among younger children. The fish are made out of paper and have a feeling written on them. Each child gets to "go fishing" by using a pole that has a string attached to it, with either a safety pin or magnet on the end. The leader attaches a fish onto the pole with the pin or a paper clip. The children then have the opportunity to share with the others the feeling they have caught and how they act when they have such a feeling. The children can also act out the feeling for the rest of the group until the group guesses what it is.

Help Children Solve Problems Constructively

Because children of domestic violence have had inappropriate role models, their own behavior is often inappropriate. When behavior is disruptive and/or hurtful to others, the adult in charge must set consistent limits and encourage positive behavior.

Teaching children to cooperate and problem-solve their differences can be valuable. For instance, when a difficulty arises I ask the children involved to tell me what they perceive is going on. I then ask if they can think of other ways they might be able to work out whatever they are angry or unhappy about. Often the children come up with alternatives.

For example:

Johnny is playing with a toy that Sara also wants to play with. She grabs it away from him and runs to the other side of the room.

Johnny: "Give me that, you brat!"

Adult: "Johnny, Sara, please come here. There seems to be a problem here. Please tell me what's going on. Johnny, I'd like to hear from you first."

Johnny: "I had that toy and Sara came and grabbed it away from me. She is a dumb brat."

Adult: "Yes, you had the toy first and Sara took it away from you. I don't like to hear the name-calling, though. Do you remember our rule about no name-calling because it hurts people's feelings?"

Johnny: "Yes."

Adult: "I'm glad you do. I think we can solve the problem if we all work together. Sara, it's your turn to talk now."

Sara: "Johnny had that toy and I wanted it so I took it. He plays with it all the time anyway."

Adult: "You took the toy because you wanted it and feel Johnny plays with it all the time?"

Sara: "Yes."

Adult: "I can see you both want to play with the same toy. Sometimes it's hard to share, but that is what we have to do here. Let's see if we can figure out some ways the two of you can both have a turn with the toy without having to argue over it."

Johnny: "We can each take a turn with it for the same amount of time."

Sara: "We can decide who gets it first by flipping a coin."

Johnny: "One of us can find another fun thing to play with until it is our turn."

Sara: "Maybe we can play together with the same toy at the same time, if we can get along."

* * * * *

If the children are not able to come up with ideas of their own, the adult may suggest one or two for them. There are times when a compromise simply can't be reached and the adult will have to decide what steps to take to end the conflict.

One effective method is to call a time out. The disruptive child is separated from the rest of the group and

instructed to stay in one place (sitting in a chair, standing in a corner, etc.) for a definite amount of time, usually several minutes. When the time is up, remind the child why he or she had to have a time out and encourage more cooperative behavior.

Reinforcing positive behavior is another important way to encourage children to behave more appropriately. This is also an excellent way to build self-esteem. I have found children are often proud of themselves when they can exchange a negative way of behaving for a positive one.

For example, you might say:

"Sam, I noticed you waited until Peggy was done with the crayons before you started using them. I appreciate your waiting so patiently."

Don't compare positive behavior to negative behavior:
"Sam, I noticed that you waited until Peggy was done with the crayons before you started using them. I appreciate your waiting so patiently. Usually you grab things and that causes problems."

* * * * *

Rewarding children for their positive behavior is a third way to encourage behavioral changes. In a classroom situation teachers often use special activities, privileges, treats or stickers as rewards. If a child dawdles, a time limit can be set. If the child does not finish his or her task within that time period, the reward will not be given.

The adult must be consistent in order to make a reward system work. If a child senses he or she does not have to do what is required to receive the reward, the behavior will not change. Children will test. It is up to the adult to remain clear and firm about the expected behavior. Ignoring certain types of behavior (temper tantrums, pouting, nonparticipation, crying when they don't get what they want, etc.) is often the best thing to do. It depends on the child, of course, and what activity is going on at the time. I usually find that children who use these tactics are especially needy and benefit from some one-on-one time whenever possible. I also try to reinforce their positive behavior at every opportunity.

There have been times when it has been almost impossible to get a child to cooperate. I try to remind

myself that the child (or children) has (have) come from a home where abusive behavior has been reinforced over and over again. When I feel stuck, I may resort to whatever comes to my mind to defuse the situation.

For example:

Once, when a 4-year-old girl was out of control, I spontaneously pretended to be a jack-in-the-box and distracted her with my silly antics. It worked! Not only did she begin to smile and calm down, but the rest of the children came over to join us in play.

* * * * *

I must stress that hitting, slapping, spanking and verbally humiliating these children, no matter how poor their behavior, is totally unacceptable. Our goal in working with children is to teach them *nonviolent* ways of behaving. We are their role models. Also, in team-teaching/supervising situations, it is important that the adults treat each other in a way that sets a good example for the children.

The Aggressive Child

Children from violent homes may behave aggressively. As I have pointed out earlier, they are growing up with a violent role model and are learning that aggression is an effective way to control others. The aggressive child needs to be taught that anger is okay, but not when it hurts the feelings or bodies of others. Some suggestions in dealing with an aggressive child are:

1. To prevent boredom, have a variety of activities available for these children. (Their attention spans are generally not very long and their moods change frequently.)
2. Eliminate activities that require long periods of quiet sitting. (This can be difficult in a classroom setting. If a problem arises, the teacher can allow short breaks—a stretching period or a recess—to prevent constant disruptions.)
3. Encourage the child to talk about or act out what makes him or her so angry through art, play or creative dramatics.
4. Communicate your limits and exactly what you expect clearly to the children and then enforce those limits.

Some aggressive children are not able to function well in groups at all because of their short attention spans, lack of social skills, and the anger they need to express. They tend to benefit more from one-on-one attention, or require extensive counseling before group participation is possible.

It has been my experience that aggressive children need a room to themselves or an outdoor area where they can freely express their anger and frustration without hurting anyone else. For instance, a room with a punching bag, mattress, pillow or batakas (a pair of objects that look like inflated baseball bats made out of a lightweight material for pounding use) provides an ideal area for a child who is full of rage and pent-up energy.

For example:

I recently worked with a 2½-year-old boy who had an extremely short attention span and spent most of his playroom time disrupting others and destroying whatever he could get his hands on. I tried water play with him and that worked well for a short time. But what he finally responded to best was using the batakas. I held one and he punched it with the one he held. His facial expression changed from anger to laughter and delight after fifteen minutes of hitting. I mentioned to him several times as we played that the batakas were not to be used to hurt others or destroy things, but to help him to "blast off" in a positive way. At the end of our play he was somewhat more manageable and played in a corner by himself rather than bothering the other children.

The Silent Child

We often worry the most about the silent and withdrawn child. Silence is both perplexing and powerful. The silent child is retreating in an effort to be safe. (This may be a conscious or unconscious decision.)

Although these children may not be very verbal, they do listen and observe. I have found the following strategies helpful in interacting with the silent child:

1. Establish trust. With a silent child this is essential.
2. Do not push the child to respond to you. Be gentle and

caring, possibly in small doses at the beginning. Let them open up at their own pace. Some silent children may begin with just a smile or a whisper.

3. Provide the child with a variety of art materials (crayons, paints, clay, sand and sand toys, water and water toys). Their art work and quiet play with sand and water may tell you how they are feeling at the moment, what their relationship is with the primary people in their lives, how they feel about themselves, etc.
4. Read the child stories and use puppets and stuffed animals to convey a specific message such as it is okay to have feelings, even angry feelings, but it is not okay to hit or be mean to another person.
5. If you sense that a quiet child is feeling sad or unsure or frightened, you can read a story about a character who feels the same way, or have two stuffed animals "talk" about such feelings and come up with comforting solutions.
6. Use positive reinforcement whenever you can find a reason. Your compliments may have to be expressed in a low key manner at first. It will depend upon the fearfulness and trust level of the child.

The Ethnic Child

Dealing with children from various ethnic backgrounds can be delicate. The child's physical and emotional needs are not the only considerations. The values and traditions of his or her ethnic group are important as well. Little has been written on domestic violence among Hispanic, Asian, Native American and Black families. Factors to be aware of include:

1. The desire to keep personal problems within the family unit.
2. The social class and level of education of the child's parents.
3. If from another country, a potential language barrier. Some languages do not have words characteristic of domestic violence (such as incest).
4. The length of time the family has been in this country.
5. The role expectations of males and females (including children) in the family.
6. The social and environmental isolation of the mother

and children (often the husband isolates the wife and the mother overprotects the children).

7. The general distrust of the American system by people of other cultures.
8. The prejudice that people of ethnic backgrounds encounter in the U.S.
9. Potential challenge to the mother's residency or citizenship.
10. The possibility of the children being placed in a foster home of a different ethnic background.

An ethnic child may first turn to a member of his or her extended family, perhaps a grandparent, aunt or uncle, for help. There are times, however, when family members cannot become directly involved due to the customs of the culture. In Hispanic families, for example, another member of the community may be enlisted to be an arbitrator who confronts the husband and wife about the abuse occurring between them. Family members are not allowed to "interfere."

If it is decided that the children in such a family must live elsewhere, they are usually sent to relatives. If there are no relatives or friends within the community willing to take the children, it can be quite frightening for them to be placed in a foster home, especially one of a different ethnic background.

There are times when the ethnic child may approach a teacher or librarian. It is advisable to refer the child to an agency that speaks his or her native language. Call your local crisis center to find out how close the nearest agency is. The child needs to talk to someone who:

1. Speaks his or her native language
2. Understands the values, traditions and beliefs of the culture
3. Understands domestic violence.

Build Self-Esteem

In addition to being sensitive to the individual needs of children with specific behavioral problems and from different ethnic backgrounds, it is important to help all children of domestic violence believe they are worthwhile individuals who are not responsible for the violence

between the adults in their home.

Many of these children have not been given the guidance, attention and positive input they need for building a strong self-image. Their self-esteem is further undermined if they have also been physically or verbally abused by a parent.

Possible ways to foster self-esteem include:

1. Encourage children to get in touch with their negative feelings and find constructive ways of expressing them. This will make room for new, positive messages.
2. Reinforce appropriate behavior.
3. Provide children with opportunities and activities in which they succeed.
4. Be honest in your interaction with the children. They are very sensitive and usually respond more favorably to adults who are clear and direct with them.
5. Be gentle and specific when it is necessary to criticize. Offer them ways to succeed rather than fail.
6. Allow enough flexibility for children to experience a feeling of freedom and independence within the setting you provide for them.
7. Teach children positive "self-talk" ("I am lovable." "I am a special person." etc.).
8. Teach children they can control how they choose to react in all situations; they do not have to hit or be abusive. For example:
   a. Model using an assertive response in a strong voice, rather than screaming or yelling.
   b. Express anger physically and emotionally by methods suggested earlier in this book and in *Something Is Wrong at My House.*
   c. Provide positive self-talks and time-outs to defuse anger.

Teach Safety Measures

One of the most important things a child living in a violent home can do for him or herself is to make sure he or she has a good safety plan. Stress that the child must *stay out* of the parents' fight and that there are options for staying safe. To help children devise a safety plan, discuss the following questions:

1. How do you know when you feel unsafe?
2. Who can you talk to when you feel unsafe (teacher, counselor, school nurse, my best friend's mom, etc.)?
3. Where can you get help when you feel unsafe (a neighbor's, my friend's house, the police, etc.)?
4. Who do you call for help? Show me how.
5. What is your phone number and address?
6. If you are not at home and you feel unsafe, where can you go?
7. If you are home and feel unsafe, where can you go to feel better?

Other Suggestions

Approaching the Mother

Approaching the mother (or both parents) with your suspicions that violence is going on in the home is often risky. Many times the mother is denying to herself that she is the victim of abuse. She is afraid to admit to others what she is going through for the same reasons her child is. She may be ashamed, afraid, guilt-ridden, confused or unable to cope.

You can start by expressing concern about her child's behavior. Be specific. Describe incidents where inappropriate behavior, such as hitting, being verbally abusive, showing signs of moodiness, inability to get along with peers, etc., has been observed. If the child is in school, classwork, grades, tardy slips, etc. may also be used to point out that something is definitely wrong.

After you present your reasons for concern, ask the mother to help you explore what may be causing the problems. Describe feelings and actions associated with domestic violence. Ask how she and her husband or partner discipline the child. Find out how the family handles conflict in general, stressing that children have different ways of reacting to what they feel about themselves and what is going on at home.

You may meet with immediate resistance on the mother's part. In that case, you can seek the help of a domestic violence agency. If you give them the specifics of a case, they will be able to advise you on how best to help the child.

There are times when the mother may feel she has finally found someone she can open up to. Listen to her as you would to her child. If your time is limited or you do not want to hear the details of her life, let her know that you empathize with her and understand her need to talk, but that you would like to encourage her to contact a domestic violence agency. The staff there are trained to help her more specifically and in depth with the problem.

Often a victim is very sensitive to rejection. Therefore, it can make a great difference as to how you encourage her to seek help elsewhere.

For example, you might say:

"Mrs. Jones, there are agencies in our area that deal specifically with problems of this kind. I am concerned

about Jason and what is causing him to act the way he has been acting. I am also concerned about how this is affecting you and the rest of your family. I will give you the names and telephone numbers of the agencies I have in mind. There are people there who may be able to help you better than I can. I hope you will consider calling them."

* * * * *

How much hope can you give the mother? Because each case of domestic violence is unique, it is not possible to offer a blanket solution or guarantee a positive outcome. The degree of abuse, how long it has been going on, the personalities of the individuals involved and the type or duration of counseling a family seeks are factors that will influence the outcome.

What Agencies Need to Know

When someone is simply calling for information, it is not necessary to give a name. Depending upon the agency and why the adult is calling, specifics about behavior problems, depression, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, ages of children and parents, etc., may be asked. If a women is calling to enter a shelter, time will be needed for the shelter worker to interview her over the phone (minimum one-half hour) to determine if she can be accepted into the shelter or safe home. Agencies vary on what they ask regarding admittance.

Agencies to Call

If there is absolute evidence of bodily injury to a child, school personnel and physicians are required by law to report to Child Protective Services. In cases of other domestic violence, it is best to call the state agency or national hotline to determine which local agency will best be able to serve the victim(s). See list of agencies in the back of the book.

Taking Care of Yourself

I am often asked what I do to take care of myself.

since working in the field of domestic violence can certainly be frustrating. At times, it is especially hard in the shelter because I know the children are only there for a very short period of time and I will most likely never see them again after they leave. One of the first things I had to do was to adopt the attitude that I would do my very best with each child and hope in some way I would add to their lives. I think back on several teachers who took special time with me when I was a child. I will never forget them and the way they cared enough to notice and encourage me. I used them as role models and now try to be a positive role model for the children I work with. I also:

1. Make sure I balance my work with time to play and enjoy myself.
2. Build friendships with others in the field of domestic violence whom I can turn to for support when I need it and who share my degree of sensitivity toward those involved in violent situations.
3. Try to stay in touch with my feelings at all times. I am not afraid to cry when I am frustrated and/or sad (usually alone) or laugh and "be crazy" if the situation arises (this can be in front of the kids).
4. Allow for quiet activities, as well as more physical ones, depending upon my mood, who I am with, and my frustration level.
5. Rely on my intuition when working with each individual child and allow for flexibility in whatever I do.
6. Realize that I must adjust to whatever situation comes up from day to day. Crisis and how individuals deal with it cannot be predicted.
7. Attend seminars and workshops to keep up-to-date on the counseling field, on working with children, and on the area of domestic violence.
8. Tell myself I am a stepping stone in the lives of the women and children I come into contact with. Even though I may not get their recognition, I know I have contributed to their lives in some way.
9. Retain my belief in the positive side of people and believe in myself and what I am doing.

Suggested Readings *and* Resources

Suggested Readings

Resources for Adults

AWARENESS: EXPLORING, EXPERIMENTING, EXPERIENCING. J. Stevens. UT: Real People Press, 1971.

BATTERED WOMEN. D. Martin. San Francisco, CA: Volcano Press, 1981.

BE A FROG, A BIRD OR A TREE. R. Carr. New York: Doubleday, 1973.

"Costume Play Therapy." I. Marcus. In THERAPEUTIC USE OF CHILD'S PLAY. C. Schaefer (ed.). New York: Jason Aronson, 1976.

CREATIVE DRAMATICS IN THE CLASSROOM. Sister J.M. Complo. Boston: Plays, Inc., 1974.

DIBS. V. Axline. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.

DRAMAKINETICS IN THE CLASSROOM. Sister J.M. Complo. Boston: Plays, Inc., 1974.

FANTASY ENCOUNTER GAMES. H.A. Otto. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD. A. Miller. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1983.

GETTING FREE. G. Ni Carthy. Seattle, WA: The Seal Press, 1982.

KIDS CAN CO-OPERATE. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1984.

MAKING CONTACT. V. Satir. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1976.

MOVEMENT GAMES FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES. E. Nelson. New York: Sterling, 1975.

PARENTS, PLEASE DON'T SIT ON YOUR KIDS. C. Cherry. Belmont, CA: Pittman Books, 1985.

PLAY THERAPY. V. Axline. New York: Ballantine, 1974.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM SEXUAL ABUSE. J.H. Rossi. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1984.

SELF-ESTEEM. V. Satir. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1975.

THERAPEUTIC USE OF CHILD'S PLAY. C. Schafer (ed.). New York: Jason Aronson, 1976.

THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT: THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF FAIRY TALES. B. Bettelheim. New York: Knopf, 1976.

WITHOUT SPANKING OR SPOILING. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1979.

YOUR MANY FACES. V. Satir. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1978.

Resources to Share with Children

ABUSE AND NEGLECT. J. Berry. Waco, TX: Word Inc., 1984.

DIAL ZERO FOR HELP. J. Jance. Lynnwood, WA: Chas. Franklin Press.

I CAN'T WAIT. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1982.

I WANT IT. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1982.

I WANT TO PLAY. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1982.

IT'S MY BODY. L. Freeman. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1983.

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. J. Jance. Lynnwood, WA: Chas. Franklin Press, 1985.

MOMMY AND DADDY ARE FIGHTING. S. Paris. Seattle, WA: The Seal Press, 1985.

MOM AND DAD DON'T LIVE TOGETHER ANYMORE. K. Stinson. Willowdale, Ontario: Annick Press, 1984.

MY NAME IS NOT DUMMY. E. Crary. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1984.

PRIVATE ZONE. F. Dayee. Lynnwood, WA: Chas. Franklin Press, 1982.

SAFETY ZONE. L. Meyer. Lynnwood, WA: Chas. Franklin Press, 1984.

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME. P. Sweet. Racine, WI: Mother Courage Press, 1981.

SOMETHING IS WRONG AT MY HOUSE. D. Davis. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1984.

STRANGERS DON'T LOOK LIKE BIG BAD WOLVES. D. Hunley, J. Buschman. Lynnwood, WA: Chas. Franklin Press, 1985.

A VERY TOUCHING BOOK. J. Hindman. Durkee, OR: McClure-Hindman Books, 1983.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME? P. Mayle. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1975.

NATIONAL AND STATE RESOURCES

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
1500 Massachusetts Ave., NW –35
Washington, DC 20005
202-347-7017

ALABAMA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Safeplace, Inc.
P.O. Box 10456 Florence, AL 35631
205-767-3076 (w)

ALASKA NETWORK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
110 Seward St., #13 Juneau, AK 99801
907-586-3650

ARKANSAS COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN
P.O. Box 807 Harrison, AR 72601
501-741-6167

ARIZONA STATE AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 27365 Tempe, AZ 85282
602-234-4402

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COALITION ON BATTERED WOMEN
P.O. Box 5036 Santa Monica, CA 90405
213-392-9874

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SHELTER SUPPORT SERVICES
P.O. Box 1955 San Mateo, CA 94401
415-342-0850

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA COALITION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 3931 Modesto, CA 95352
209-575-7037

COLORADO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COALITION
P.O. Box 18902 Denver, CO 80218
303-394-2810

CONNECTICUT TASK FORCE ON ABUSED WOMEN
P.O. Box 14299 Hartford, CT 06114
203-524-5890

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
My Sister's Place
P.O. Box 29596 Washington, DC
202-529-5991

LOUISIANA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
c/o Crescent House
1231 Prythania New Orleans, LA 70130
504-523-3755

MAINE COALITION FOR FAMILY CRISIS SERVICES
P.O. Box 304 Augusta, ME 04861
207-623-3569

MARYLAND NETWORK AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
2427 Maryland Ave. Baltimore, MD 21218
301-268-4393

MASSACHUSETTS COALITION OF BATTERED WOMEN'S SERVICE GROUPS
25 West St., 5th Fl. Boston, MA 02111
617-426-8492

MICHIGAN COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
10435 Lincoln Huntington Woods, MI 48070
313-547-1051

MINNESOTA COALITION FOR BATTERED WOMEN
435 Aldine St. St. Paul, MN 55104
612-646-6177

MISSISSIPPI COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 333 Biloxi, MS 39533
601-436-3809

MISSOURI COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
27 North Newstead St. Louis, MO 63108
314-781-9948

MONTANA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 6183 Great Falls, MT 59406
406-228-4435

NEBRASKA TASK FORCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
YWCA
222 South 29th St. Omaha, NE 68131
402-345-6555

NEVADA NETWORK AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
680 Greenbrae Dr., –270 Sparks, NV 89431
702-358-4214

NEW HAMPSHIRE COALITION AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 353 Concord, NH 03301
603-224-8893

NEW JERSEY COALITION FOR BATTERED WOMEN
206 W. State St. Trenton, NJ 08608
609-695-1758

NEW MEXICO COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
La Casa, Inc.
P.O. Box 2463 Las Cruces, NM 88004
505-526-6661

NEW YORK STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
5 Neher St. Woodstock, NY 12498
914-679-5231

NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS
P.O. Box 595 Wilmington, NC 28402
919-343-0703

NORTH DAKOTA COUNCIL ON ABUSED WOMEN'S SERVICES
State Networking Office
311 Thayer, Rm. 127 Bismarck, ND 58501
701-255-6240

ACTION FOR BATTERED WOMEN IN OHIO
P.O. Box 2421 Youngstown, OH 44509
216-793-3363

OKLAHOMA COALITION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
124 Colorado Woodward, OK 73801
405-256-8712

OREGON COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
2336 SE Belmont St. Portland, OR 97214
503-239-4486

PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
2250 Elmerton Ave. Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-652-9571 or 1-800-932-4632

RHODE ISLAND COUNCIL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 1829 Providence, RI 02912
401-272-9524

SOUTH CAROLINA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
P.O. Box 7291 Columbia, SC 29202

SOUTH DAKOTA COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE
Resource Center for Women
317 S. Kline Aberdeen, SD 57401
605-226-1212

TENNESSEE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 831 Newport, TN 37821
615-623-3125

TEXAS COUNCIL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE
509-A West Lynn Austin, TX 78746
512-482-8200

UTAH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNCIL
c/o Division of Family Services
150 West North Temple Salt Lake City, UT 84103

VERMONT:
Chris Phelps c/o Herstory House
P.O. Box 313 Rutland, VT 05701
802-775-3232 or 802-775-6788

VIRGINIANS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 5602 Richmond, VA 23220
804-780-3505

WASHINGTON STATE SHELTER NETWORK
1063 S. Capital Way #217
Olympia, WA 98501
206-753-4621
Statewide Hotline 800-562-6025

WEST VIRGINIA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
P.O. Box 2463 Elkins, WV 26241
304-636-3232

WISCONSIN COALITION AGAINST WOMAN ABUSE
953 Jennifer St. Madison, WI 53703
608-255-0539

WYOMING COALITION ON FAMILY VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT
P.O. Box 1127 Riverton, WY 82501

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Davis is the author of *Something Is Wrong at My House*, a book for children about domestic violence, published by Parenting Press and distributed by Network Publications.

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